



FACT SHEET VIETNAM

Women in Agriculture, Environment and Rural Production



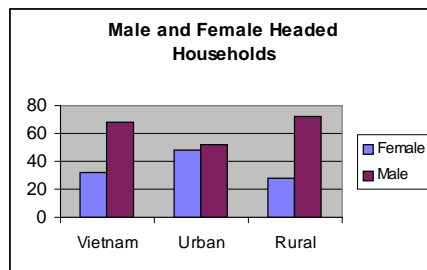
KEY FACTS

- Vietnam's population is still unbalanced, with 51.5 % females and 48.5 % males
- 32 % of the households are headed by women
- women make up 53% of farming population
- women hold dual responsibility for farm and household management
- women above 25 have a 15 % lower literacy rate than men
- in rice farming women have a substantial role, which is enlarging
- women are actively involved in aquaculture, artisanal fisheries and manage small livestock production
- marketing of agricultural products is mainly done by women
- women contribute actively to household income through marketing, petty trade, food processing and handicrafts
- women's contribution as family labour is undervalued and rarely included in accounting as work
- there are no substantial gender disparities in basic human capacities, according to the last ratings in the HDI

GENERAL PROFILE

Population

Vietnam has a population of 73.8 million inhabitants, 21% urban and 79% rural. The great majority of the population lives in the lowlands. Population density is high, for example in the Red River delta there are over 7,250 persons per square kilometer. An average 35% of the population is under 15 years of age; only 7 percent of the population is over 65 years old. At present, the population growth rate is 2.3%, and the fertility rate 3.7%. With the youthful age structure and high birth rates the population is expected to grow to 122 million by 2050. Data show that 51.5% of the population is female and 48.5% is male. The long period of warfare and economic migration has produced a dearth of adult men, especially in the age group 35 to 64, in which there are 117 women per 100 men.



Source: GSO, 1995

The average percentage of female-headed households in Vietnam is 32%, and nearly 23% of the population live in female-headed households. The above graph shows the distribution in percent of male and female-headed households. An almost 50-50 percentage is evident

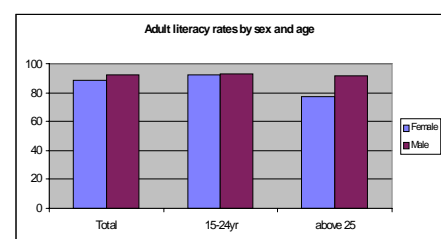
in urban areas such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and there are 28% female-headed households in rural areas.

Among women heading their households, 42% are still married to their husbands who are either present or are working as migrant labourers away from the village. 41% are widows, and a small group is separated or divorced. Contrary to the situation in many countries, rural female-headed households are less vulnerable to poverty than rural male-headed households. Remittances from male migrant labourers seem to improve the economic position of many female-headed households in rural areas.

During the liberation movement women's economic participation became more important and with this came their recognition as equals with men. Following the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1975, their role has declined. Vietnam's Constitution and legislation recognize equality of men and women.

Education

The adult literacy rate (women and men 15 years and above) is 88.7% for women, and 95.8% for men. However, the literacy rate for women above 25 years old is 15% lower than for men, as can be concluded from the following graph.



Source: United Nations, 1995

Labour

The economically active population consists of 48 per cent men and 52 per cent women. Women represent 48.5% of the employees in state-owned enterprises, 54% in collective enterprises and 49% in private enterprises.

Agriculture employs the largest proportion of the labour force (71%), followed by industry (12%), and the remaining labour force employed in trade and education.

Human Development Index (HDI) rank of Vietnam is 121 of 174 countries, indicating a medium human development, defined by medium life expectancy at birth, high educational attainment and medium levels of income. The Gender-related Development Index (GDI) rank for Vietnam is 91 of 130 countries. The difference between the HDI and the GDI is +2. This means that Vietnam has succeeded in building basic human capacities of both women and men, without substantial gender disparities.

AGRICULTURE

Of all households in Vietnam, 70% earn their livelihood from agricultural production. Rice and fish cultivation predominate as main sources of livelihood.

In Vietnam, 53% of the farming population is female and 73% of these women are employed in the agricultural sector. In addition, women are involved in trading the agricultural produce in local markets and marketing cooperatives.

Crop production

The predominant crop is rice, which is grown in the Red River delta, the Mekong delta and coastal zones.

Gender Division of Labour in Rice Farming			
Tasks	MA	FA	Both
Clearing field	(X)	X	
Ploughing	(X)	X	
Making bunds	(X)	X	
Preparation seedbed	(X)	X	
Sowing seedbeds		X	
Transplanting		X	
Irrigating	(X)	X	X
Applying fertilizer	(X)	X	X
Pest control		X	
Weeding		X	
Harvesting		X	
Post-harvest processing		X	
Marketing rice		X	
MA = Male Adult FA = Female Adult Both = Men and women (X) = in absence of male labour, done by women			

Source: UNIFEM 1988

Traditionally, the first stages of rice cultivation are male designated and the latter stages female designated. However, the traditional task division has changed due to lack of male labour. Women are thus increasingly involved in all stages of rice production.

Apart from rice, rural households produce a variety of vegetables and fruits in their homegarden. In upland areas, 80% of the land area, farmers produce perennial crops, such as tea, coffee, rubber, pineapple, and have fruit trees.

Forestry

A process of deforestation has resulted in the situation that at present, forests cover a mere 20% of total land area, compared to 42% in 1943. Deforestation is mainly caused by clearing of forests to expand cropping area, and partly by firewood collection. 54% of households use wood as their main source of fuel and 34% use other collectable items such as leaves and husks.

Forest areas are state owned, and 65% of the forestry workers are women. Recently, Vietnam has been experimenting with a programme that allocates forest lands to individual household management. Households are responsible for re-

forestation, protection and management.

Fisheries

Vietnam has around 1.4 million ha of inland waters for aquaculture purposes, majority paddy fields and further reservoirs, tidal flats, lagoons and small lakes and ponds. One third of this water surface is already used for aquaculture purposes; 61% for fish culture and 39% for shrimp culture. Aquaculture is included in the integrated farming system approach, the VAC system. In addition, Vietnam has marine fisheries along the coast.

Both men and women are actively involved in aquaculture. Men are involved in decisions of fish species to be raised, timing for stocking, buying fingerlings, netting and harvesting. Women are often involved in daily feeding such as gathering grass and manure and feeding fish by rice bran. Mainly women are involved in small-scale processing, fish sauce production and trading of fish.

Livestock

In Vietnam livestock play an important role in the farming system.

Larger livestock like cows and buffaloes are rarely consumed for meat or milked, but used as draught animals in the



fields. For this reason they are most common in the lowlands. In many areas there is a shortage of draught animals, reflecting the shortage of straw and grazing land.

Pig and poultry growing is a lucrative source of additional income for

women. Recently, in the uplands women are generating income through sale of milk, and cheese products, from local cattle and improved goats.

ENVIRONMENT

A number of environmental trends have an impact on rural livelihood in general and on women's lives in particular. Women are usually disproportionately affected because they are more dependent on natural resources in order to carry out their farm and household activities. In many provinces of Vietnam a process of soil degradation is apparent due to intensive use of chemical fertilizers, insecticides and weed killers. Soils in upland areas have grown thinner: 50% of soils in hilly and mountainous areas are degraded. In areas where two to three paddy crops are grown soils have become saline.



Pest and disease outbreaks have been occurring more frequently, especially in the Mekong delta, where yearly two to three crops of rice are grown. There are harmful impacts due to improper use of pesticides. Rice and fish production system is adversely affected by pesticide use. The process of deforestation reduces forest resources available to the households and leads to soil degradation. Fish resources are declining due to over-fishing.

RURAL PRODUCTION

Off-farm activities are undertaken by both women and men. Women earn a regular cash income, mostly through processing, production and sale of food, trade activities, wage labour and handicrafts. Men derive income from wage labour, especially as non-agricultural and migrant labourers, and transportation and construction workers.



The **Vietnam Women's Union** (VWU) is an active women's mass organisation in Vietnam. The VWU is a quasi-governmental body functioning at national, provincial, district and commune levels. It is the second key player in Vietnam's rural financial market, organising and training women groups for income generation, as well as for savings and credit activities.

FOOD SECURITY

Agriculture in Vietnam is still considered small-scale and low-yielding compared with that of other countries in the Asia region. Slow progress in the agricultural sector has been attributed to the high incidence of natural calamities and a marginal food and livestock industry. Although food production has increased, food insecurity persists. However, since 1989 Vietnam is a rice-exporting country.

The Vietnamese Government has launched its Food Security Programme in every zone. Under this

programme, locally known as the VAC system, fresh-water aquaculture is integrated with crop production, horticulture and livestock husbandry. The profile of gender roles in Vietnam farming systems bears evidence that women are key contributors to household food security.

POLICY AND PLANNING FOCUS

The transition to a market economy in Vietnam in recent years has resulted in a shift from the commune towards the household as the basic economic production unit. A national symposium on Women and Agriculture organised by FAO and the Ministry of Food Industries in 1994 found that while rural households have generally benefited from recent economic reforms, women still have less access than men to farm technology, technical knowledge, savings and operating capital.

In order to recognize gender differences within households in the context of agricultural and rural production, policy-makers and planners need to:

- ✓ Collect gender-disaggregated local data and conduct gender sensitive agricultural censuses;
- ✓ Formulate gender-sensitive policies and plans based on a gender-disaggregated needs assessment;
- ✓ Identify strategies to expand women's participation in the transitional economy;
- ✓ Formulate policies and plans to improve women's access to resources.

PROGRAMME FOCUS

Agricultural and rural development programmes in Vietnam need to include in their activities the following areas of intervention, in order to achieve an effective movement that addresses both women and men's priorities:

- ✓ Train field staff in gender-sensitive and participatory planning and programme implementation;
- ✓ Acknowledge women as farmers, instead of as mere wives of male farmers;
- ✓ Improve the extension system to become equitable, in order to reach both women and men;
- ✓ Identify and respond to agricultural and household technology needs of women, in close collaboration among agricultural researchers, implementing agencies, grassroots workers and the Vietnam Women's Union;
- ✓ Support women in their marketing activities, by providing local marketing information, improving transportation and storage facilities, improving processing and packaging techniques and provision of credit;
- ✓ Pay attention to health issues in the agricultural system, control of water-borne diseases and safe pesticide-handling methods;
- ✓ Intensify IPM activities to provide safe food and to reduce adverse health impacts among rural women.

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For more information

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